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Mincemeat- a Rich History

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AT CHRISTMAS there is a great hospitality in all the land. An Englishman of old at the opening of the day had all his tenants and neighbors enter his hall at day break. The rooms were festooned with holly, ivy, and mistletoe, and a Christmas log in the hearth glowed warmly.

Every bit of pewter and brass was as polished as the most refined gentleman. The tables were spread with roast beef, turkeys, venison, boars' heads, peacock, fruits, plum pudding, mince pies, and sugar and jelly desserts.

From that time in old England, the festivity of the Christmas season and many of the Christmas

traditions have come down to us. Among them is the tradition of mince pies. Meat pies were commonly used there, and the mince pie was probably a development from it. The famous "Christmas pie" was undoubtedly mince.

Pies Were Symbolic

These mince meat pies were a part of the Christmas traditions of old England. They were made in oblong shapes to represent the manger at Bethlehem; the lattice tops were symbolic of the hayrack in the stable. The apples were representative of the growth and fertility to come with the new season; the oriental spices were reminiscent of the gifts of the Wise Men.

The Pilgrims prohibited the observance of Christmas in 1659, banning mince meat pies, because of their religious significance. Later on, mince pie was restored to favor. This time it came in a round pie dish and had a more tender crust. The pie that Little Jack Horner put his thumb into was probably a mince pie.

Through the centuries, mince meat has undergone some changes. Originally, mince meat contained fruit, spices, suet, meat and liquor. Presently, a mince meat pie consists of a finely chopped mixture of raisins, apples and spices, with or without meat.

Meat Omitted

Frequently the liquor, meat and suet are omitted. This leaves a mixture chiefly of fruits, molasses or sugar, and spices. In some states the commercial product must contain at least ten percent cooked meat. Variations of mince meat pies may contain oyster, eel as the meat, dates, currants, and pears in addition to raisins, caraway seeds, or rose water.

A typical recipe for the original English mince meat pie is:

Homemade Mince Meat Pie

- 2 lbs. beef neck
- 1 lb. suet
- 4 lbs. tart apples
- 4 c. sugar
- Juice & grated peel of 2 oranges
- Juice & grated peel of 2 lemons
- 1 pt. fruit juice or cider
- 1 Tbsp. salt
- 2 lbs. currants
- 1 Tbsp. salt
- 3 lbs. seedless raisins
- ½ lb. citron, cut fine
- 1¼ tsp. grated nutmeg
- ½ tsp. mace

Simmer beef in water to cover until tender (about 3 hours). Cool. Put through a coarse blade of the food chopper with suet and apples.

Add other ingredients. Mix. Simmer one hour.

Use 1 pint or 2 cups for an 8-inch pie. Fill pastry lined pie pan and adjust top crust. Bake in a very hot oven (450°) for 35 minutes.

A modern adaptation of this recipe, keyed to today's busy homemaker, would appear like this:

Mince Meat Pie

- Packaged mince meat
- 2 cups apples, coarsely grated
- ½ tsp. lemon peel, grated
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice

Combine the ingredients in a sauce pan. Slowly heat and stir the mixture. Pour into an 8" pie shell and bake at 400° for 35 minutes.

mince meat — a history as rich as its filling



Individual mince meat pies can be given variety by using gala topping of orange-flavored whipped cream. Meringue and nut-sprinkled cream cheese may also be added after the tarts are baked.